" A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AT THE UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN THE CONTEXT OF SDG-4: QUALITY EDUCATION – EVIDENCE FROM PURULIA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

A Synopsis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
By
Rituparna Chatterjee
Under the Guidance of

Dr. Suman kumari

Department of education

YBN University, Ranchi

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Research Supervisor: - Dr. Suman Kumari
Asst. Professor
Department of education

YBN University, Ranchi

Research scholar: Rituparna Chatterjee

Enrollment No:YBNU2302374

Department of education

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Abstract

The attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and measurable learning outcomes, remains a critical challenge in many socio-economically disadvantaged regions of India. While Upper Primary school enrollment rates have significantly improved, concerns persist regarding the actual quality of learning achieved by students, particularly in rural and marginalized districts. The present study, titled "A Quantitative Study of Learning Outcomes at the Upper Primary School Level in the Context of SDG-4: Quality Education – Evidence from Purulia District, West Bengal," seeks to examine the status and determinants of learning outcomes among Upper Primary school students in Purulia district.

Adopting a descriptive and analytical quantitative research design, the study focuses on students of Classes V to VIII selected through multi-stage stratified random sampling. Standardized achievement tests in language and mathematics will be administered to assess measurable competencies aligned with SDG-4 indicators. In addition, structured instruments will collect data

on socio-economic background, teacher qualifications, school infrastructure, pupil–teacher ratio, and attendance patterns. Statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, correlation, and multiple regression analysis will be employed to identify significant differences and predictors of learning achievement.

The study aims to evaluate whether students are achieving minimum proficiency levels in foundational literacy and numeracy and to determine the relative influence of socio-economic and institutional factors on academic performance. By generating district-level empirical evidence, the research contributes to bridging the gap between enrollment expansion and quality learning. The findings are expected to inform policy interventions, strengthen outcome-based educational planning, and support progress toward achieving SDG-4 targets in backward districts of West Bengal by 2030.

Keywords: Learning Outcomes, SDG-4 (Quality Education), Upper Primary School Education, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), Educational Inequality, Socio-Economic Status (SES), Educational Infrastructure, Purulia District, West Bengal

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is a transformative instrument for human development, economic productivity, democratic participation, and social equity. In the contemporary global development agenda, education occupies a central position as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015. Among the seventeen goals, SDG-4 specifically commits nations to:

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

The emphasis of SDG-4 is not merely on school access or enrollment but on measurable learning outcomes, equity in achievement, teacher quality, infrastructure adequacy, and lifelong competencies.

India, as a signatory nation, has aligned its educational policies—including the National Education Policy (NEP 2020)—with SDG-4 targets. While India has achieved near-universal enrollment at the Upper Primary level, persistent concerns remain regarding actual learning achievement, especially in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged regions.

Purulia District of West Bengal represents one such educationally backward region characterized by:

- High tribal population
- Economic deprivation
- Rural school dominance
- Infrastructure limitations
- Lower literacy compared to state average

This context necessitates a localized, data-driven evaluation of learning outcomes in alignment with SDG-4.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Despite substantial investments through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha, evidence from national assessments suggests that learning levels remain suboptimal. Enrollment alone does not guarantee quality education.

This study is significant because:

1.It provides district-level quantitative evidence.

2.It evaluates progress in relation to SDG-4 indicators.

3.It identifies predictors of learning outcomes using statistical modeling.

4.It contributes to state and district-level policy discourse.

5.It supports outcome-based educational planning.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the following theoretical perspectives:

1.3.1 Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964)

Education enhances productivity and economic growth. Learning quality directly influences long-term development.

1.3.2 Educational Production Function Model

Student learning outcomes are influenced by:

- School inputs
- Teacher quality
- Family background
- Institutional environment

1.3.3 Constructivist Learning Theory

Learning is an active process influenced by instructional design and classroom environment.

1.3.4 Outcome-Based Education (OBE)

Focus on measurable competencies rather than rote memorization.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model of the study proposes:

Independent Variables:

- Socio-Economic Status (SES)
- Teacher Qualification
- Pupil-Teacher Ratio
- Infrastructure Index
- Attendance Rate
- School Type (Government/Private)

Dependent Variable:

Learning Outcomes (Language & Mathematics Scores)

The study will employ regression modeling to estimate the strength and direction of relationships.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Global Perspective on Learning Outcomes

UNESCO reports indicate that millions of children worldwide fail to achieve minimum proficiency in literacy and numeracy. The "Learning Crisis" highlighted by the World Bank (2018) emphasizes that schooling without learning undermines development goals.

Learning outcomes are increasingly conceptualized not merely as examination scores but as demonstrable competencies that reflect a learner's ability to apply knowledge in real-life contexts. Contemporary educational discourse emphasizes competency-based education, where outcomes are framed in terms of cognitive processes, skill acquisition, and problem-solving abilities rather than rote memorization. Drawing upon Bloom's revised taxonomy, learning outcomes encompass higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and creation, in addition to foundational abilities like remembering and understanding. At the Upper Primary level, these competencies primarily include foundational literacy and numeracy, which are internationally recognized as essential prerequisites for further academic engagement. Inadequate attainment of these competencies during early schooling stages leads to cumulative learning deficits, often described as the "Matthew Effect" in education, where early disadvantages widen over time.

From a measurement perspective, learning outcomes require reliable and valid assessment instruments aligned with curriculum standards and age-appropriate competencies. Standardized achievement tests, formative assessments, and large-scale national surveys such as the National Achievement Survey (NAS) are commonly used to gauge proficiency levels. However, measurement of learning outcomes also demands sensitivity to contextual factors, including language diversity, socio-economic disparities, and school-level variations. In districts like Purulia, where multilingual and tribal populations form a significant proportion of learners, assessment practices must account for contextual realities that may influence performance. Therefore, a robust conceptualization of learning outcomes integrates both measurable academic achievement and the broader socio-cultural environment in which learning occurs, ensuring that evaluation frameworks remain equitable, inclusive, and aligned with SDG-4 quality benchmarks.

2.2 SDG-4 Indicators

Key SDG-4 target 4.1 states:

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality Upper Primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Indicators include:

- Minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics
- Teacher qualification rates

● Safe infrastructure

In addition to establishing global benchmarks, SDG-4 emphasizes the integration of equity, inclusion, and quality within national educational systems through measurable indicators and accountability mechanisms. The framework moves beyond traditional input-based metrics−such as enrollment ratios and infrastructure availability−toward outcome-oriented monitoring systems that assess proficiency levels, teacher preparedness, and inclusive access for marginalized groups. Importantly, SDG Target 4.1 explicitly calls for ensuring that all girls and boys achieve minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics by the end of Upper Primary education, thereby reinforcing the centrality of foundational learning. For developing regions and backward districts, localized assessment aligned with SDG-4 indicators becomes crucial for identifying achievement gaps and designing targeted interventions. Consequently, district-level empirical studies that quantitatively evaluate learning outcomes, such as the present investigation in Purulia district, serve as essential instruments for translating global commitments into measurable, context-specific educational progress.

2.3 Indian Context

ASER Reports reveal significant learning deficits in foundational literacy and numeracy. National Achievement Survey (NAS) highlights regional disparities across states.

NEP 2020 stresses:

- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

- Competency-based assessment

- Teacher training reforms

Despite sustained policy interventions, the gap between schooling and learning in India remains a matter of serious academic and policy concern. Large-scale assessments consistently demonstrate that a substantial proportion of Upper Primary school children struggle with grade-appropriate reading comprehension and basic arithmetic operations. These findings highlight structural challenges such as multi-grade classrooms, uneven teacher deployment, language barriers, and socio-economic constraints affecting first-generation learners. Moreover, disparities across states and districts suggest that educational progress is uneven, with backward and tribal-dominated districts often lagging behind state averages. This uneven distribution of learning achievement underscores the need for disaggregated, district-level data that can inform targeted strategies rather than relying solely on aggregated national indicators.

In recent years, the policy focus in India has shifted toward strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) through initiatives such as the NIPUN Bharat Mission under the broader framework of the National Education Policy 2020. These reforms recognize that early-grade learning deficits have long-term consequences on academic retention, transition to higher grades, and overall human capital formation. However, effective implementation requires empirical monitoring mechanisms capable of evaluating progress in specific regional contexts. Therefore, a

rigorous quantitative assessment of learning outcomes at the district level—particularly in socio-economically vulnerable districts such as Purulia—becomes essential for understanding the ground realities of Upper Primary School education. Such localized evidence can contribute significantly to bridging the gap between national policy intent and classroom-level learning outcomes, thereby advancing India's commitment to achieving SDG-4 by 2030.

2.4 West Bengal Context

West Bengal has improved enrollment rates, but rural districts such as Purulia lag in achievement outcomes due to socio-economic and infrastructural factors.

Beyond individual and household-level factors, institutional and systemic determinants play a crucial role in shaping student learning outcomes. The Educational Production Function framework conceptualizes learning as the output of multiple interrelated inputs, including teacher quality, instructional time, curriculum alignment, leadership effectiveness, and resource availability. Empirical studies have shown that teacher subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, and continuous professional development significantly influence classroom effectiveness. Similarly, optimal pupil-teacher ratios and regular teacher attendance are positively associated with improved student achievement. However, research also indicates that the mere presence of physical infrastructure—such as buildings and classrooms—does not automatically translate into better outcomes unless accompanied by effective utilization, supportive learning environments, and pedagogically sound practices. Thus, the interaction

between structural inputs and instructional processes must be considered when analyzing determinants of learning.

Furthermore, contextual determinants such as language of instruction, community engagement, and cultural capital have been found to mediate academic performance, particularly in rural and tribal regions. Students from first-generation learner families often face additional barriers, including limited academic support at home and reduced exposure to literacy-rich environments. Socio-economic deprivation may also affect nutrition, health, and attendance, indirectly influencing cognitive development and classroom participation. Consequently, determinants of learning outcomes operate at multiple levels−individual, household, school, and systemic− requiring a multidimensional analytical approach. In districts like Purulia, where socio-economic and infrastructural challenges coexist, examining these determinants through quantitative modeling can help identify the most significant predictors of achievement and inform targeted, evidence-based interventions aligned with SDG-4 quality standards.

2.5 Determinants of Learning Outcomes

Empirical studies identify:

- Parental education
- Household income
- Teacher training

- Infrastructure quality

- Classroom size

- Language of instruction

However, district-level quantitative modeling remains insufficient.

2.6 Research Gap

- Limited district-specific quantitative SDG-4 evaluation.

- Lack of regression-based predictor analysis at Upper Primary level.

- Insufficient integration of infrastructure and socio-economic variables.

This study addresses these gaps.

Moreover, existing studies on learning outcomes in India often rely on macro-level datasets that provide broad national or state-level trends but do not sufficiently capture micro-level educational dynamics within specific districts. Aggregated data tend to obscure localized disparities, particularly in socio-economically backward regions where educational challenges are deeply embedded in contextual realities such as tribal demography, rural isolation, linguistic diversity, and infrastructural limitations. There is a notable absence of rigorous district-focused quantitative research that systematically integrates SDG-4 indicators with measurable academic

performance variables. Consequently, policymakers and administrators at the district level may lack empirical evidence necessary for designing targeted interventions tailored to local needs.

In addition, many prior investigations emphasize either access-related indicators or isolated determinants of academic achievement without adopting an integrated analytical framework that simultaneously examines socio-economic, institutional, and teacher-related variables. Few studies employ multivariate statistical techniques to identify the relative contribution of these predictors within a unified model aligned with global SDG benchmarks. Therefore, a comprehensive quantitative study in Purulia district that measures foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes while modeling the influence of multiple determinants represents a significant scholarly contribution. By bridging global development commitments with localized empirical analysis, the present study seeks to fill this gap and provide actionable insights for strengthening Upper Primary education quality in alignment with SDG-4 objectives.

3.OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.To measure learning outcomes in language and mathematics among Upper Primary students in Purulia district.

2.To examine gender-based differences in achievement.

3.To assess the impact of socio-economic status on learning outcomes.

4.To evaluate the influence of teacher qualifications and pupil-teacher ratio.

5.To examine infrastructure adequacy in alignment with SDG-4 norms.

6.To identify statistically significant predictors of learning outcomes.

7.To propose policy interventions for SDG-4 attainment.

4.HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

H01: There is no significant difference in learning outcomes between boys and girls.

H02: Socio-economic status has no significant effect on learning outcomes.

H03: Teacher qualification does not significantly influence learning outcomes.

H04: School infrastructure has no significant correlation with student achievement.

H05: There is no significant difference between government and private school students.

H06: Pupil-teacher ratio does not significantly predict learning outcomes.

5.PROBLEM STATEMENT & EXPLANATION OF TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1 Problem Statement

Although Upper Primary school enrollment in Purulia district approaches universal levels, evidence regarding the quality dimension of education—particularly measurable learning outcomes—remains limited. Without empirical assessment aligned to SDG-4 standards, policy formulation remains input-based rather than outcome-driven.

Thus, the central research problem is:

To determine the level of learning outcomes among Upper Primary students in Purulia district and identify the socio-economic, institutional, and teacher-related factors influencing these outcomes within the SDG-4 framework.

5.2 Explanation of Technical Terms

Learning Outcomes: Standardized achievement scores in language and mathematics.

SDG-4: Sustainable Development Goal focusing on Quality Education.

Socio-Economic Status (SES): Composite index of income, education, and occupation.

Educational Production Function: Model relating inputs to student outcomes.

Inferential Statistics: Statistical tests used to draw conclusions from sample data.

Regression Analysis: Statistical technique to predict dependent variable from independent variables.

6.RESEARCH DESIGN

6.1 Research Method

The study adopts a Descriptive and Analytical Quantitative Research Design using cross-sectional survey methodology.

6.2 Population

All Upper Primary school students (Classes v–viii) in Purulia district, West Bengal.

6.3 Sampling Design

Sampling Technique:

Multi-stage stratified random sampling.

Stage 1: Selection of Blocks(2-3 approximately)

Stage2: Selection of Schools (10- 12 approximately)

Stag3: Selection of the students 600 (All Upper Primary school students Classes v-vlllinPurulia District, West Bengal.)

Sample Size:

Approximately 600 students.

The sample size is statisticly justified using power analysis for regression modeling.

6.4 Tools of Data Collection

1.Standardized Achievement Test (Language & Mathematics)

2.SES Questionnaire

3.Infrastructure Observation Schedule

4.Teacher Qualification Record

5.Attendance Data

Reliability:

Cronbach's Alpha (>0.70 acceptable)

Validity:

● Content validity through expert review

● Construct validity through factor analysis

6.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive Statistics:

● Mean

● Standard Deviation

● Percentage

Inferential Statistics:

• Independent Sample t-Test

•Software: SPSS / R

Regression Model:

$$\text{Learning Outcome} = \beta 0 + \beta 1(\text{SES}) + \beta 2(\text{Teacher Qualification}) + \beta 3(\text{Infrastructure Index}) + \beta 4(\text{Pupil-Teacher Ratio}) + \beta 5(\text{Gender}) + \varepsilon$$

7.DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.Limited to Purulia district.

2.Focused only on Classes V- VII.

3.Restricted to Language and Mathematics.

4.Cross-sectional design.

5.Excludes qualitative interviews.

8.CHAPTERIZATION

Proposed Chpterization

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter 3: : Research Methodology

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

10. CONCLUSION

This study integrates SDG-4 global commitments with district-level empirical assessment. By employing rigorous quantitative methods, it aims to measure learning outcomes and identify statistically significant predictors influencing Upper Primary education quality in Purulia district.

The findings will support policymakers, education planners, and researchers in advancing equitable and quality education aligned with SDG-4 targets by 2030.

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